

self. Then the disposition to act cruelly against the suspected person arises to a mental disease, and by cooperation of others under the same aberration makes a mania.<sup>1</sup> The explanation lies in autosuggestion or fixed ideas with the development loosely ranged under hysteria, which is the contagious form of nervous affection. The term " epidemic " can be applied only figuratively.

" Mental disease occurs only on the ground of a specific constitutional and generally hereditary predisposition. It cannot therefore be spread epidemically, any more than diabetes or gout."<sup>2</sup>

The epidemic element is due to hysterical imitation. In like manner, epidemics or manias of suicide occur by imitation, e.g.

amongst the Circumcellions, a subdivision of the Donatists, in Africa, in the middle of the fourth century A.D.<sup>3</sup>

Cognate with this was the mania for martyrdom which it required all the authority of the church to restrain.<sup>4</sup> Josephus<sup>5</sup> says of the Galileans, followers of Judas of Galilee, that they were famous for their indifference to death. Convents were often seats of frightful epidemics of hysteria. The accepted religious notions furnished a fruitful soil for it. To be possessed by devils was a distinction, and vanity was drawn into play.<sup>6</sup>

Autosuggestion was shown by actions which were, or were supposed to be, the actions proper for " possessed " people. Ascetic practices prepared the person to fall a victim to the contagion of hysteria.

The predisposition was also cultivated by the religious ecstasies, the miracle and wonder faiths, and the current superstitions.

Then there was the fact which nearly any one may have experienced, that an old and familiar story becomes mixed with memory, so that he thinks that what he heard of happened

to himself.  
 Untrained people also form strong convictions  
 from notions  
 which have been long and firmly held without  
 evidence, and they  
 offer to others the firmness of their own  
 convictions as grounds  
 for accepting the same faith without proof. Ritual  
 acts and  
 ascetic observances which others can see, also  
 conduct and zeal

<sup>1</sup> Friedmann, *Wahnideen im Volkerleben*, 207.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>4</sup> Lecky, *Eur. Morals* ^ I,

391.

<sup>8</sup> Gibbon, Chap. XXI.

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*Antiq.*, XVIII, i.

<sup>6</sup> Regnard, *Sorcellerie* ^ etc.